

Justyna Schollenberger
Instytut Kultury Polskiej
Wydział Polonistyki
Uniwersytet Warszawski

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE HUMAN-ANIMAL BORDER IN THE CHOSEN WORKS OF CHARLES DARWIN

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates how the human-animal border is conceptualized in the chosen works of Charles Darwin. Main theoretical frame of reference are contemporary posthumanism and animal studies theories, concerned with the question how animal otherness is possible to represent and also with the problem of animal subjectivity. The major thesis of this dissertation states that the problems arising in posthumanism and animal studies can be viewed in the context of the core question of anthropology, that is, the question concerning the relation between “me” and the “other”. Our identity is gained only through the confrontation with the other – human as well as non-human, as this dissertation aims to show.

The question of the human-animal border can be viewed in two ways. Firstly, according to the evolutionary theory, we can focus on the animal descent of man and its consequences. Secondly, as it is proposed in this thesis, we can focus on the possibilities of various confrontations and relations with the non-human animals. In this dissertation Darwin is viewed as “proto-post-humanist”, who is concerned with the question of relation between human identity and animal otherness, and, above all, with the different forms of human-animal encounter.

Hypothesis of this dissertation states that close reading of the Darwin’s works allows us to see and analyze traits of the struggle with the consequences of his own scientific theory. Darwin consequently and enthusiastically blurs the human-animal distinction. It can be said that he “dehumanizes” man by showing his animal descent. However, at the same time he “anthropomorphizes” animals, showing that they represent most of the traits and powers traditionally assigned to man. Thus, he rather turns to the complexity of the animal world than aims to degenerate human. Status of the human can be seen as problematic. At one point, man

is viewed as one of many animal species, as a part of natural world. At the same time, however, he transcends the natural order by means of self-consciousness, which allows him to discover his own position in the world and the order of the nature.

Those problems are reflected in the narration of Darwin's works. I distinguish three groups of subjects, so called "subjects of the border". Their human/animal status remains mobile and uncertain. They are: Fuegians, also called "savages", monkeys (and apes) and dogs. I trace their representations in Darwin's works with the intention to see them as crucial figures of his thought. Their presence points at the problem of the porous nature of traditional divisions.

Dissertation is divided in three chapters. In the first chapter, I analyze theoretical problems of the animal turn in humanities, posthumanism as well as the possibility of linking them to the anthropological discourse. The second chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the *Voyage of the "Beagle"*. Here I propose the interpretation of the Fuegians status in Darwin's works, and I also analyze the descriptions of animals and landscape. Third chapter is focused on the *Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* and *The Expressions of Emotions in Man and Animals*. Here, I interpret and analyze the status of monkeys and dogs. Chapter ends with the short analysis of the *The Formation Of Vegetable Mould Through The Action Of Worms With Observations On Their Habits*, which is interpreted in the light of posthumanistic theory of the relational mode of being.